

**Mundos Especulares:
Filmic Reconstructions and Remedies of
Historical Memory Trauma:
Argentina and its *Desaparecidos***

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Introduction

When I first conceptualized this project, I hoped to establish a large and somewhat scientific formulation of film's role in memory construction, especially between generational gaps of large national historical events and periods. Thus throughout the formulation of the analysis there was an implicit causal structure of preceding films and representations that put into circulation specific information and images that would then be responded to by the population, as well as the future representations. Moreover, during further research of the specific political history of Argentina's post-dictatorship period, from 1983 to present, I became intensely aware of the complex play of specific presidential administration's agendas and their treatment of the past, through public institutions as well as judicial decisions regarding those responsible for the violent rupture in Argentine culture, society, and memory.

Once upon finishing the initial process of research I realized the fruitlessness of attempting to map a purely cognitive study of representation, and began focusing more towards the issues of representation and historical epistemology, specifically dealing with large traumatic events; while also becoming increasingly interested in the specific politics of memory or remembering. This political persistence of memory and coming to terms with this period hit me very strongly, as my first few days in Buenos Aires, I repeatedly saw television news reports about citizens bringing former members of the military administration to trial. The civilian's ability to now seek executive justice against a system, that had so thoroughly and profoundly taken that ability away, represented a completely changed role of the individual within Argentine society. Yet, at the same time, the consistent reference of President Christina Kirchner to this period, at one point

in time comparing the dictatorship's selfish destruction of Argentina's culture as being parallel to the equally selfish powerful farming entities (who were protesting against her increased export taxes). Thus the contemporary political role of the dictatorship played almost two contradictory functions within society, one as a means of citizen participation and justice, and the other as executive rhetoric and manipulation.

So it is at this point that I attempted to make sense of the complex process of Argentina's assimilation and healing of this extremely traumatic historical period. Through the analysis of the films, I was able to construct a general framework and hypothesis to which I discussed with individual film critics, professors, and makers; as well as the guides and curators of the Espacio para la Memoria; and citizens of varying ages, including the 60-year woman that I was staying with. It was thus through the individual conversations and discussions, combined with theoretical and academic readings, and further film viewings and analysis, that I was able to articulate, in some minor form, the complex interflow between history, politics, memory, representation, and the individual.

I am aware that this in no one can begin to express the complex and infinitely more emotionally profound matrix of perception, persistence, and politics that exist within Argentine society and its relation to this period. Yet, I hope that it can at least begin to structure and conceptualize not only the importance of film in the construction of popular memory and understandings of history, but also that role in the larger function of history within societal politics. It is through this line of discourse then that I think the understanding of history and memory can most physically be manifested and thus understood.

THESIS

*For history to be a history of trauma means
that it is referential precisely to the extent
that it is not fully perceived as it occurs.
-Cathy Carthur*

The extent to which large scale collective traumas have been experienced during the 20th century has lead some to call it the century of historical trauma (Radstone, 457). One of the major underlying issues with large scale and collective trauma is the epistemological limits of representation in attempting to narrate, rationalize, and/or transmit such violent and unfathomable events and experiences. Furthermore, there is the issue of the mutability of memory and history and the necessity for persistent questioning and intervention against any attempts to create a static and closed definition of that history and its significance. In traumatic national experiences, such as the *proceso de normalization* of Argentina's dictatorial period from 1976-1983, the covert nature of the traumatic suppression combined with the intensive cultural censorship, not only created an absence of political and moral activism, but also an effective loss of public memory, likened to a cultural unconsciousness. The question arises then of how do the formalistic and thematic constructions and intentions of that culture's representations develop during their post-traumatic periods; focusing on the epistemological issues of representing traumatic historical experiences and events, as well as the active re-interpretations of that history's status in the contemporary society. The films that will be analyzed are *La Historia oficial* (1985), *La Noche de los lápices* (1986), *La República perdida I and II* (1983,1986), *Juan, si como nada hubiera sucedido* (1987), *Crónica de una fuga* (2006), and *Los rubios* (2003); as well as discussions of *Montenores, una historia* (1994), *Cazadores de utopia* (1996) and *Garage Olimpo* (1999). Thus, the films that will be

analyzed and discussed represent the historical arc of Argentine's filmic representation of the 30,000 disappeared citizens, from the immediate period of traumatization to contemporary understandings of that trauma and its representation. The specific political and historical context of each film is extremely important also, considering the different presidential administration's and their legislative and judicial treatments of the topics, or their politics of memory. Thus these films will be analyzed within a historical context of national trauma recovery as well as how both films' formalistically construct their relation to the past and their intentions in the present.

Theoretical Concerns

To Write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric- Theodor Adorno (1949) (Hirsch, 4)

Trauma has been defined as events, which rupture the temporal linearity and schematic understanding of the victim's pre-existing world and post-traumatic comprehension (Caruth, 61). The historian Hayden White has gone so far as to state that after the Holocaust, and Hiroshima, "So large and unwieldy are these events that they actually begin to defy explanation, resist representation, and refuse consensus about their meanings or even what happened." (Skoller, xxxvi). Such collective traumatic events then rupture the possibility of representation through traditional forms of historical narrativization. Thus arises the overarching moral question of whether to sacrifice the epistemological laws of historical trauma comprehension or the public necessity for understanding and closure.

El propósito central es ... promover una conciencia social que valore el recuerdo activo y prevenga toda forma de autoritarismo en las generaciones futuras contribuyendo a construir identidad y a mejorar la cultura política.

-Memoria Abierta (Lorenzo, 149)

Memoria Abierta is an Argentine organization that seeks to open ex-detention centers to the public as well as compile an archive of interviews and “una constelación discursiva”, from as wide and varied body of people who lived during the last dictatorship, in order to create a more active and participatory space for remembering that period (Memoria Abierta, 152). In discussing the active attempts and issues in the construction of collective memory in Argentina, Fernando Reati references Andreas Huyssen concept of “musealización”, and explains that museums and memorials “convierten a la memoria en espectáculo...por tranquilizar las conciencias y librar al ciudadano de la responsabilidad de ejercer una memoria individual y activa”. (Reati, 161) Thus the concern becomes that whilst constructing a collective memory and an articulation of a traumatic past, there is the need to provoke active participation in the intended population, in order to analyze and not merely accept the significance of such events. Moreover this participation is vital in protecting such psychologically traumatized and emotionally loaded periods from the threat that museums “coopta, reprime, esteriliza” history for the sake of the national powers behind such institutions.

The threat of coopted history is especially central in Argentina’s post-dictatorship period, considering the almost polar legislative responses of the presidential administrations in dealing with the issues of memorialization as well as justice. Therefore, the filmic representation of history must concern itself, not only thematically but as well in its formalistic positioning of the spectator as a moral and active interpreter of the transmitted events and their significance, especially within the historical and political context of their production.

Historical Backdrop

The tribunals of Nuremburg were only for the conquered...One does not ask for an accounting from a victorious army-Roberto Viola (1980) (Knudson, 104).

On March 24, 1976, General Jorge Rafael Videla led a military coup to overthrow the failing democratic government of Isabel Perón. Isabel had taken power in 1974, after the death of Juan Perón, the legendary leader that modernized the country in the 1950s, while creating a populous political platform and ideology based upon the strength of the working class. He had returned from exile only a year earlier, after a popular uprising pressured the dictatorship of Onganía to open elections, a concluding point to the series of weak civilian governments and dictatorships bidding for power, since Peron's forced exile in 1955. Yet, Perón's role to restabilize the country only further separated the growing militant left and right political bodies, even within the peronist movement itself, resulting in a power vacuum after his death (*La República perdida, Cazadores de utopia*).

Thus, Videla's Junta and the subsequent "dirty war" or *la Guerra sucia* arose as the zenith of a multi-generational series of traumatic violent events and retaliatory post-traumatic violence of varying political body bidding for power, usually characterized between the radical left and the multiple dictatorial powers since the 1950s. As the historian Antonius Robben states, "narrative accounts of suffering were passed from one generation to the next, became part of social memory, and were embraced as social traumas which influenced political action" (167). Thus the traumatic events of the final dictatorial period can be seen as a consequence of a running national consciousness and identity of traumatizing socio-political elements and violence.

In order to conclude this series of national traumatizing events and transitions, both sides then sought a final act that would forever establish their own utopian dream (Robben, 174). The economic and military power of the dictatorship, combined with counterinsurgency training from the US and France (Robben, 181-182) led to the defeat of the leftist militant threat, which at most numbered 2,000, definitively by 1978 (Knudson, 108). The Junta's usage of domestic invasion, familial abductions, and the multiple forms of torture were then consciously deployed not merely for information gathering (especially after the physical threat of militants had subsided) but moreover for the effective social traumatization of its society (Robben, 234).

The further disappearance of possibly 28,000 people represented the Junta's conscious destruction of the societal section that were labeled as ideologues or sympathizers of the radical leftist groups. This section of the population included "liberal professionals, journalists, intellectuals, artists, university students, and school teachers" (Osiel, 122), as well as filmmakers, with the most internationally known example being Raymundo Gleyzer (Barnard, 95). Psychiatrists, who had counseled traumatized militant leftist, were targeted also, as the military consciously sought to exacerbate the traumatic effects in as many psychological and social aspects as possible (Robben, 187).

Furthermore, newborn babies were abducted from female prisoners in clandestine detention centers and given to families of the ruling elite in order for future generations to develop under strong Catholic ideologies. The military government was consciously traumatizing the country, while the destruction of the intellectual and cultural production sphere further collapsed any societal discourse and sense making. This strict control of cultural production, was an "intento a construir una consciencia una-dimensional"

(Abrevaya, int.), creating an artificially restricted understanding of political events and eliminating the possibility of citizens acting as conscious and active political and moral agents. As a Naval officer said to a captured journalist, Jacobo Timerman, the Junta was seeking a “final solution” that would lead to “fear for several generations” (Knudson, 95).

In 1982, the Argentina military admitted defeat to the British, in the Malvinas (Falklands) conflict, which most citizens thought they were winning, due to the strict control of the four nationalized television channels and 90 radio stations. By this point though, the national economy and the growing number of protests against state suppression had lead to the dictatorship declaring to hold elections on October 30, 1983 (Knudson, 104).

Rather than causing a silencing fear of the country’s population, the junta atrocities caused an outcry throughout specific sections of the population. This outcry manifested itself into street protests typified by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo whose white shawls and large posters of missing family members had become internationally known since 1978 (Knudson, 103). Furthermore, as thousands of publications and exposes were released, the country once again attempted to come to terms with another period of violent oppression and cultural censorships. As journalist and historian Andrew Graham-Yooll claims, “Argentina thus recurrently becomes a country without memory” (577). Therefore the subsequent productions of historical discourse were not just for the recovery of the immediate past but a loss of identity form a series of traumatic periods.

In 1983, when Raul Alfonsín and his Radicalist party came to power, they established the CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas), which in September 1984 released *Nunca Mas*, a nearly 500 page report through

interviews and investigations concerning as many aspects as possible of clandestine detention centers and the *proceso*. Reati states, the societal effect of this information, combined with the public confessions of key members of the military and the church, “y la abundancia de memorias, testimonios, relatos y recordatorios, existe cierta materialidad de la historia que muy pocos pueden negar” (Reati, 159). In the face of such an overload of information, the citizens of Argentina were forced into reflecting upon their moral and societal responsibilities, which had been relinquished, taken from them, during the dictatorship.

Initial Responses: Fiction and Defining Innocence

“narrative is a certain way of reconciling emergent with prior knowledge”

-David Herman

Scripts, sequences, stories:..(1048).

In the end of 1985, the film *La Historia oficial* was released, the first major film to directly address the concerns of the *desaparecidos*, especially from the standpoint of contemporary Argentine society. The film itself follows the story of a middle-class history teacher as she discovers that her adopted daughter is an abducted daughter of a *desaparecido*. As the film historian Daniel Sendrós recalls, the film “tuvo un peso político tremendo porque llegó a todos los públicos y abrió la discusión” (Interview). The timing of the film, combined with its subject matter, general accessibility, and extremely professional production, lead it to become a major blockbuster success, nationally and internationally, as it went on to win the Oscar for foreign films selection. The film is thus extremely important because it brings the discussion of the dictatorship into the realm of the common people, raising specific questions to the spectator

concerning their role in society and history. The representations of violence and state terror are also important seeing that they are some of the first audio-visual representations to reach such a large-scale audience.

The film begins contextualizing very explicitly its intentions and significance. The very first shot is of megaphones playing the national anthem in the courtyard of a high school. As the anthem repeats “libertad”, the camera pans across the students, the question raised of how shall these students face the moral concerns of an inherent contradiction in the recent periods of their national history and their identity, and how shall their teachers and the public institutions of education interpret and transmit these events. Following the credits, the spectator is placed, through a first person perspective, into the role of the student in the classroom, as the teacher (Alicia) claims, ‘By understanding history we understand the world. No people can survive without memory. History is the memory of its people’. Thus the individual viewer is confronted with his or her own responsibility as an active producer and transmitter of history.

Though the central character Alicia begins as the didactic teacher, her naivety of recent events leads her to become a history student, and a conduit of learning through viewer identification. This identification is established as the beginning section of the film builds Alicia’s moral identification as an upstanding and fairly traditional mother, whose social context is of the upper middle-class, as she dines with her husband’s associates, who include military officers and a transplanted American businessman. The viewer’s identification is also explicitly defined, such as during a scene of interplayed glances, in which the viewer is placed in her perspective watching the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo march, and then viewing Alicia’s response, back and forth repeatedly.

It is not until Alicia re-meets her high school friend, recently returned from exile, that Alicia and the viewers are forced with the issues of the recent dictatorship. After a pleasant evening together, Ana explains to Alicia the details of her experience when she was captured and tortured, shocking Alicia to the point of eventually telling Ana to leave, after Alicia explained that babies were taken away from the captive mothers and bought by families of the regime and its sympathizers. Thus begins the path of Alicia's investigation into the origin of her daughter Gaby, as she slips down the rabbit hole into the underbelly of Argentine history. The official story then is publicly complicated once her students place newspaper clippings of articles about the disappeared all over her chalkboard, further necessitating the need to confront her husband and their child's story. As she drives downtown to confront her husband, a fellow male colleague accompanies her, to coquet, as well as discuss one of her students, sparking a conversation about the *desaparecidos*. While she asks completely naively about their whereabouts, he responds rhetorically asking why should she care, because if it were true it would, 'necessitate the complicity of many people'. This is a serious concern towards the moral responsibilities of all members of a society, especially in front of a government that attempts to nullify those active responsibilities while eliminating other members of that society.

Though Alicia's response and complete naïveté to the situation may be slightly exaggerated, the fact of the matter is that a large portion of the population did not address the horrors of state terror, as many of my interviewees attested. Fernando Peña and Eva Loguerico both explicitly described their experience growing up during the dictatorship (he was in high school and she in elementary school) that their middle-class families did not discuss the dictatorship. It was not until the huge economic failures, beginning in

1980-81, that the middle-class and the general population began to question the dictatorship. Thus, the concerns of responsibility and the acquisition of information about the government of that period became increasingly relevant retrospectively, as the general population experienced a belated traumatization, caused by the fact “that history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s trauma” (Caruth, 24).

Once enlightened then, Alicia confronts those institutions and social bodies whose complicity was necessary for such atrocities to take place: first her husband and his large corporation and US business partners, then the hospital and their apparently missing archives, and then lastly the Catholic Church. Yet, all her discoveries are extremely oblique, and her incriminations of these institutions very local, without ever really mentioning the active political member of the junta and its administration. During the first protest she witnesses in front of her husband’s building, shouts are heard in reference to the disappeared, the failed neoliberal economy and the Malvinas (or Falkland) war. Yet, there is no further extrapolation of such event, nor a connection to those responsible. The only element of the protest that actually registers with Alicia, and is thus central to the viewer, is the demands that the children of the disappeared be returned to their families. It is this isolation of information and oblique references to larger societal concerns that limits this film’s capabilities of producing an active critique of history.

The film does have moments of verbal explicitness of general events of state terrorism, but are embedded within the domestic or quotidian contexts to which ease the effects upon disrupting that world. Furthermore, structures of visual allegory are embedded within the verisimilar domestic world in order to implicitly register the

intended information, much like Lévi-Strauss concept of narrative (in shamanistic healing practices), that “the technique of the narrative thus aims at recreating a real experience in which the myth merely shifts the protagonists...in order to make the center of inexpressible and painful sensations “clear” for her and accessible to her consciousness” (Lévi-Strauss, 194). This re-signification of the myth into the real or quotidian is exemplified in the extremely “realistic” and life size plastic baby, bought by Alicia’s husband in the beginning of the film, followed immediately by Gaby entering the room, thus linking the two, and foreshadowing the inevitable discovery. Then the doll appears again later, as Gaby is playing mother to it, a group of young boys break into the room with loud toy guns, and crash into her play house, while she screams uncontrollably at their mock violence. Thus the doll becomes further re-signified, as Gaby unknowingly reenacts her real mother’s experience, painfully and allegorically referencing the familiar intrusions of the junta’s forces. Such narrative allegories then make “accessible to [the] consciousness” experiences that are unimaginable, as Eva described that watching it as a young adolescent, the allegory registered very strongly, and still “es muy referencial de todo” (Loguerico, Interview). This is the only representation of state sponsored violence within the film (excluding the concluding spousal abuse scene), but yet its embedded signification within the domestic realm and the “real experience”, especially of childhood, retains an intense psychological registration in the viewer.

Even the two explicit testimonies are contextualized within domestic or Alicia’s common social spaces, as Alicia meets one of the mothers at a café very similar to the one she met her male colleague. Also, Ana’s testimony is in the comfort of the living room, and is somewhat primed during her two other conversations before. The first is

during a reunion of old school friends, while discussing children, Ana laughs and says that during her pregnancy she was called a “captive balloon”, and then during dinner with Roberto and Alicia, she’s quoted as calling her high school a prison. In both instances the terms have a somewhat perverse double meaning, as her story is told in the subsequent scene, exposing that darker side of Argentine society and the secrets of that period.

The other testimony is important also as that the woman’s story emphasizes the development of an individual’s life and the anecdotes and joys that are retained through the memory of those youths, frozen in the pictures that the memories are projected upon. It is through these parallel and universal experiences that lie in the power in the testimony (causing Alicia to cry). It is the verbal construction and transmission of individual experiences then that another individual can rationally accept such traumatic information. This is why Alicia begun to question in the first place, because of Ana’s story. Yet still, to what ends, to what political action will her new relationship with this Madre bring. She is still worlds apart, separated during the marches, as she watches on with the spectators and photographers in the crowd.

For in the end her final decision is still only a domestic, a familial decision to walk out on her husband, but only after he slams her fingers in the door and her face in the wall, an action alone that would necessitate a separation. Thus lies the essential flaw in the film, that though the ending is ambiguous in order to allow for their viewer to make their own moral decision, the scope of the individual, to whom the viewer identifies with, is isolated and limited to domestic decisions, essentially impotent in the larger socio-political scheme of events. Therefore, while the domestic space and life acts a conduit

for transmitting and reflecting upon the individual in face of a horrendous truth, the effects are ultimately embedded and contained within a family crisis.

The film then is not actually a museufication of history but rather a domestication of the events. As Horacio Campodónico states the effect upon the viewer is “la identificación es emotiva no reflexiva,” and is manipulated and then ease with a final “catarsis” (Interview), by funneling large moral and social concerns into the realm of the family and then allowing them to cease there. The domestic representations and allegories correspond to a positive transmission that seeks to limit the possibility of “retraumatization” (discussed shortly) of the viewers, but the inability to fully express the importance of this societal issue, limits the individual participation of concerns outside of the domestic realm.

La Noche de los lápices

The first film to explicitly represent the story of the *desaparecidos* was *La Noche de los lápices* (The night of the pencils, 1986), directed by the veteran Héctor Olivera. The film was based upon the testimony of Pablo Díaz, a high school student abducted with five friends, aged 16-18, on September 16, 1976. They were part of UES (Union of High School Students), and in the film were abducted for organizing a series of nonviolent protests over public bus prices. This case had actually become increasingly well known towards the end of the dictatorship, and thus corresponds to a crystallization of a story already forming in the matrix of public memory (Wolf, 96).

La Noche de lapices begins with two pre-adolescent boys running into the high school of the provincial city La Plata, accompanied by a theme song, which is youthfully

upbeat yet slightly ominous. At once, Olivera begins to frame the social intentions of this piece as the two youths (re)visit the school of the abduction. As they proceed up the stairs, the film cuts to the shot of a classroom door of glass framed in wood. Over the door appears a disclaimer that 'this is a film about real events and people. For arguable reasons certain changes have been added that do not alter the spirit nor the truth that they account'. Once the disclaimer fades then the two boys peak their heads through the window of the door, repositioning the viewer back into the characters' world, while also further framing the intentionality of the film. The window of the door is for the viewer to see the innocent youth of the past while at the same time, the children peering into the window represents the youth of the later generation witnessing the events of the past. The film's disclaimer then is not merely a declaration of the obvious for adult viewers, but more importantly a self-validating truth statement for the younger audience.

Furthermore, the basic claim, while denying its own transparency as a window to the past, does claim that it retains the truths of those events and implies film's ability to project, possibly through retrospective vantage point, the underlying essence of historical events. This retrospective vantage point is then constructed with the omniscient perspective of the film camera that quickly cuts between multiple spaces, as well as witnesses the events during which the main protagonist (testifier) is blindfolded. This ability at once implies the retrospective historical construction of the piece, influenced by the superfluous amount of reports that were produced following the redemocratization. Yet, considering the amount of information that had been gathered, there are a number of mayor inconsistencies in the political nature of this representation.

Though the abductees themselves may not have taken part in militant actions, they were front organizations of militant groups: the UES were representative of the Montoneros while Pablo's Juventud Guevaristas were controlled by the Marxist PRT-ERP (Robben, 213). The only signs of such affiliation are when a Montonero symbol is sprayed on the school wall, in response to Junta agents breaking up a UES school dance (substituted for the actual militant backed protest against the Junta); and when Pablo gives an impoverished woman canned food and "Juventud Peronista" pamphlet with Che's face on it. Pablo himself (in the film) becomes profoundly shocked when later he meets a militant who was detained for murdering a member of the military. While Olivera's neglect of details in regards to the students' affiliates might be for the sake of reducing political complexities, especially for younger members of the audience, the effect is suspiciously rhetorical.

Such rhetorical construction focuses on the innocence of the characters, whose idealism and humanitarianism is emphasized in the two scenes before the March 24, 1976 coup d'état. The first scene is when Pablo and the others are seen bringing food to an impoverished family in their shantytown, while his friend Claudia teaches the children. Pablo smiles at her as she teaches, a warm pleasantness that subtly references their own instinctual familial possibilities, which will never be fulfilled. The second scene is a comical presentation of the history of imperialism using cartoon slides and oral narration. Claudia's parents sit in as they all laugh together at this innocent critique. What these two scenes represent then is the innocent and humanitarian ideals and practices that accompany their leftist orientation, masking the militant overtones of their older counterparts.

Such nostalgic simplification then acts as a memorialization of lost innocence and ideals, while arguing for their perpetuation in the present. Such idealism, and also family orientation helps also to enhance viewer identification. As noted earlier, the budding young heterosexual romantic possibility between Pablo and Claudia and the high school dance represent generic expectations embedded into the story in order to more effectively transfer the traumatic story into the viewers' pre-existing schemas, or "real experiences" (Lévi-Strauss). In reality, there was no relationship between the two, but rather it was invented solely for this effect. Such emotionally loaded identification then may have negative effects on the viewers, especially the younger ones, with the possibility of "retraumatization" in front of such confusing information so close to its occurrence. Marianne Hirsch discusses LaCapra theory in terms of "tragic identification and the constitution of one's self as surrogate victim...results in retraumatization" (M. Hirsch, 16). Thus, the invention of romantic interest and relationships intensifies the emotive identification and subsequent effect upon the viewer, leading to a negative transmission without the space to rationalize such events and their meanings in a contemporary setting.

This emotional identification with the characters is also cognitively constructed through a highly teleological development of a verisimilar pre-traumatic world, consisting largely of school and domestic spaces. This linear development enables a stronger verisimilitude between the viewers' (young and old) world to the characters' tragically lost lives, while the linear construction also enhances the cognitive sense of a unified experience, as the viewer witnesses the teleological events unfold.

Thus the film not only acts as a sight of nostalgic memorialization but also as a form of memory in itself; or what social theorist Alison Landsberg calls, "Prosthetic

memory”, which she defines as an “alternative living memory” through mass media cultural arenas (66). Film then provides a possibility not merely to transfer information of past events to future generations, but to allow for a more multi-sensory referent in the viewer’s mind constructed through witnessing the physical recreation and unfolding of those events.

The linear development of a verisimilar world in real time, seen through an omniscient or third person perspective then creates the effect that one is witnessing an actual series of events. This “prosthetic memory” then becomes more affective through emotionally laden character identification, as well the manipulation of viewer’s pre-existing schemas and genre expectations, which enable quick cognitive and emotional registration without analysis. It is important to note also that the music of the film is extremely emotively resonant and dramatic, and is strategically placed throughout the emotional range of the film, even during the torture scene.

The abduction and torture itself isn’t until half way into the film, after the verisimilar domestic world has been well established and the moral and emotional identification with the characters deeply rooted. The literal destruction of Pablo’s domestic world, as his parents are held against the ground and all the familial memorabilia destroyed, is then followed by Pablo’s blind-fold detention, mock execution, and torture with an electric prod. In a sense then this teleological development followed by an exceptionally violent series of acts parallels (real-life) Pablo’s own traumatic rupture with the past. But at the same time it also violently ruptures the pre-existing “prosthetic” experience of the viewer, whose understanding of this as a reference to real events, forever changes their personal construction of reality and those political bodies

that govern it. The trauma transferred still remains outside the body of the viewer though and is then empathetic more so than a direct threat; also Pablo's face is covered with a pillow, thus slightly limiting self-identification. Yet, as LaCapra points out the level of retraumatization exists cognitively, through emotional identification more so than remaining physical threats.

Within the confines of the detention center then, remnants of Pablo's old life and reference to the quotidian remain, as he becomes reunited with his co-patriots, as they are detained in separate cells adjacent each other and through openings in the cell roofs are able to communicate with one another and effectively attempt to re-project their old world and their relationships on their new environment. At one point in time they actually perform gym stretches. Thus the remainder of the film becomes more uplifting as the characters' 'collective presence, and subsequent projections of their past world's social structuring and activities, enables them (and the viewer) to keep from a psychological break down.

This section does still retain elements of testified truths such as the birth of a child in the detention center (off-screen) and the attempted sexual assault of a female prisoner, both of who are peripheral to the central character. Also, the omniscient retrospective camera routinely cuts to Claudia's mother and another boy's mother, as they search for the whereabouts of their children from various public officials. In each instance, the police, the town commissioner, even the church either denies knowledge or imply consent to the Junta's *proceso*. In this sense then the film emphasizes the loss of the domestic space and its consumption into the public space, as well as references the initial

formulation of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the necessity to question those guilty institutions.

The final sections of the film then allows the audience to become educated, or at least historically satiated, as they wait out the prison scenes for Pablo's inevitable release, while somewhat relieving the torture trauma. Thus *La Noche...* is able to effectively construct an accessible yet emotionally powerful narrative that physically recreates a well-known case, catapulting the story (and its representation of a larger phenomena) further into public discourse and into the minds of the viewers, especially the youth. The film then becomes a crystallized "cultural memory" as defined by Marianne Hirsch, "by means of identification across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides" (M. Hirsch, 6). While the facts are simplified and the representation is somewhat trivially wrapped in genre, it nonetheless allows for an emotionally sensitive and traumatized population to satiate a need for vicarious witnessing, but yet its overtly emotive construction is extremely manipulative for younger viewers, most likely inflaming or "retraumatizing" those who've yet to fully form their own schematics of society, politics, and interpersonal relations. The fact that the film was shown often in secondary and high schools speaks to the profundity of the generational effects of the film, as well as the limitations of the teaching staff in conceptualizing and articulating their own lessons of this period (Listorti, Centrome, Interviews).

At the time the film was being made, Argentina was going through trials for the Junta members, sentencing 5 of 9 major members to sentences of four and half years to life imprisonment. Thus the film itself was made at a moment in which Argentine society was coming to executive terms with the traumatic past, prosecuting those responsible. In

this sense then, Olivera may have felt he was only stoking the flames of a fire about to go out, once the trials would conclude and the guilty brought to justice, while his representation would help memorialize and define the innocence of those lost. Yet as will be discussed later, the judiciary process of those held responsible would change dramatically between administrations, as well as the critical interpretations of the militants' intents and responsibilities within the political dynamic of that period.

Recovering History: The Return of the Documentary

*What kind of cinema does Argentina need?
A cinema which develops them. A cinema that brings them consciousness...*
-Fernando Birri,
Cinema and Underdevelopment (86)

...only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past-which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.
-Walter Benjamin
Thesis on the Philosophy of History (254)

In 1986, the feature documentary *La República perdida II* (The lost republic) was released, and is still to this day, one of the most thorough analysis of the economic plans of the last Argentine dictatorship. The breadth of its analysis traverses the major infrastructural economic decisions, especially those leading to excesses in imported consumer goods and subsequent domestic market dependency, to the social-political decisions such as the disbanding of all unions (including the film union), as well as demographical changes, such as the forced deportation of migrant workers, especially from Bolivia and Chile. The amount of information and the accessible linear structure of the film is a huge investigational and organizational task in itself. There is little doubt this information greatly affected the population's understanding of this political period.

Yet, the formalistic and thematic construction of this film is the quintessential example of ‘museification’.

Throughout the film, the presence of interviews is minimum and subordinate to the overarching structure of the “voice of god” narration, and the compactly interwoven stream of archival images. Thus the images themselves lose the initial signification and become re-contextualized and “coopted” by the narrator’s individual and rhetorical account of history, with the logical and linear connections creating a univocal “meta-narrative” of history. It is through the absence of structural reflection that the means of production and the individual narration becomes masked by the overwhelming mimesis of the archival footage. Then, the absence of historical reflexivity masks the infinite series of events, images, and interpretations that have been erased by the selective construction of specific occurrences and information. As Benjamin states, “for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (255). The rhetorical structuring and manipulation of the past and the elimination of possible alternatives increases the authority of the work while subsequently erasing the other.

This is an inherent contradiction of the two *La República perdida* films, whose attested intentions, proclaimed in the first film, released in 1983, are:

La Argentina se está convirtiendo en un país sin memoria. La destrucción de documentos y archivos continúa consumándose, a veces por motivos políticos, ... Esta película quiere contribuir a la recuperación de nuestro pasado y de nuestra historia.

Yet, once again the contributed history is didactic and univocal, restricting the possibility of other histories, as the first film maps out the history of Argentina in the 20th century, in a 2-hour string of archival footage and voice over. It begins with the idealization of Yrigoyen, his subsequent fall, and then continues up to the return to democracy in 1983.

In a sense the film acts as an epic tragedy, as one moment of economic prosperity and political stability is followed by a series of violent and destructive political struggles, with the two extremes accompanied by a repeated musical theme. Emotional expectations are built and then thwarted by the continued failure of stability, until finally the tragedy is relieved with the return to democracy and the victory of the Radical party. Though the ultimate relief may have undoubtedly spoken to the general sensibility of that period, the treatment of history to create such an extended series of tragedies and emotional registers does not create an objective interpretation but rather an emotive manipulation of the viewer. The emotive construction throughout this specific depiction of history, then adds further affect to this “metanarrative”.

If a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well.

-Jean François Lyotard
The Postmodern Condition (xxiv)

This ‘coopted’ version of history then becomes a powerful instrument in defining the necessary steps of that society, to which Félix-Didier claims, “*La República perdida* (fue) *construída con una línea y una visión de la historia muy particular...y además muy justificadora del gobierno Radical*”. This is why then that Yrigoyen is emphatically the idealized leader to which all has been a tragedy since, and why Perón is only allowed to speak during his infamous meeting with the militant Peronist group, the Montoneros, during the beginning of a violent party division that raged into the beginning period of the dictatorship, especially after Perón’s death in 1974. The Montoneros, and the Juventud Peronistas are both portrayed extremely negatively, as the years of violence leading up to the 76 junta are seen as a tit for tat of political assassinations between the

leftist militant groups and the right wing paramilitary counterpoint the AAA (Alianza Argentina Anticomunista). This war thus leading to the inevitable legitimization of the junta; coinciding with the official theory of the “dos demonios”, presented during the 1985 trials, claiming the opposing evils of the militants and the military alienated the population while leaving them stuck in the middle of the violence (Reati, 166).

Therefore, the sequel follows to expose the absolute of all the tragedies, the dictatorship’s absolute destruction of the Argentine economy. It represents a very recent history to which is constructed through immutable facts and the most powerful political bodies and individuals, where the individual is lost to a sector of the population or a mass body in the streets, and very rarely an active individual agent, let alone a testifier. The inactiveness of the individual, lest they be lead to more militancy, then further attests to the necessary reliance upon political representatives in the creation of socio-political history.

Thus the narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it.

-Jean François Lyotard (20)

It was important for the current administration and its representatives to emphasize the absolute necessity for peace and stabilization, but the implicit message of cathartic relief and undoubting trust of the individual towards the ruling administration, deters the active participation necessary in a new and recovering democracy. The appropriation of history in moments of political transition is as Benjamin defines as the seizing of memory in “a moment of danger” and that, “the danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes” (255). Thus, the intended recovery of history was completely

negated by the rewritten and univocal “museification” of history for the service of the reigning party, a further testament to loss of individual power within Argentine society.

...rather than have his ability to make history recognized, he is only permitted to read history, contemplate it, listen to it, and undergo it. The cinema as a spectacle aimed at a digesting object is the highest point that can be reached by bourgeois filmmaking.

-Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino,
Towards a Third Cinema

In 1987 another documentary, concerning the recent injustices of the past dictatorship, was released, entitled *Juan: como si nada hubiera sucedido* (Juan, as if nothing had happened). The film investigates the disappearance of the political student journalist Juan Hermon, the only *desaparecido* from Bariloche in the western Río Negro province. *Juan...* had a much more strikingly independent or minimalist production compared to the didactic *La República perdida*. The film itself was not largely funded by the state film commission but rather by Evangelisches Zentrum für entwicklungsbezogene Filmarbeit (EZEf), a small German distribution company that specializes in foreign films.

The independent or alternative documentary in Argentina had been previously internationally renown, especially amongst cinema historians and political activists; with the two largest and most famous examples being *Tire dié* (1960) and *Las hora de los hornos* (1968), the later helping to materialize the concept of the internationally and revolutionary “Tercer Cine” or “Third Cinema”. Thus, before continuing the discussion of *Juan...* it is necessary to establish the theoretical and historical context of “Third Cinema” and its foundation in the documentary.

“Tercer Cine” was first coined by *Cine liberación* in March 1969 in *Cine cubano* (Getino, 99), but owes some tribute to the foundation of the critical social documentary

practice of Fernando Birri. After returning from studying at the Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografia in Rome, Birri established the Escuela Documental de Santa Fe in 1956, in order to create social documentaries. He felt that the function of the documentary was “By showing how reality *is*, and in no other way” to expose the “superstructures” that “presents us with a false image of both society and our people...conceals them” (Birri, 93). This theoretical foundation inspired Birri and his school to produce extremely thorough and arduous social investigations of life in the Santa Fe region, the most internationally resonating one being *Tire dié*, depicting poor street children’s attempts to survive as the beg for change from passing trains.

Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino then equally sought to film a social documentary, about the working class of Argentina, when the filming experience radically changed their intentions and “inflected their own ideological trajectory in ways they themselves could not have fully predicted” (Grant, 256). The result was one of the most radical and militant documentaries to be created, as Robert Stam states, “If there are two avant-gardes-the formal and the theoretico-political-then *La hora de los hornos* surely marks one of the highest points in their convergence” (Grant, 254). It was in the revolutionary and militant message, form, and openness for debate, that *La hora de los hornos* not only attempted to expose elements of society to the spectator, but moreover, force them into participation, into action. Solanas and Getino articulated afterwards, “*Third cinema* is...the greatest possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point” (37). The literal openness of the film, the questions followed by black fillers and breaks, called for an active participation of the viewers, whose very presence was already a political act considering the political and life-

threatening repercussions of the then dictator General Juan Carlos Onganía's policing force. Thus, it was the oppressive context and the subsequent popular uprising "and the campaign to democratize the country" (Getino, 100) combined with the international call for liberation and revolution, that Third Cinema came to be necessitated from merely a social criticism to an inciter of militancy. As Solanas and Getino quote Mao Tse-Tung

The active role of knowledge is expressed not only in the active leap from sensory to rational knowledge, but, and what is more important, in the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice... The practice of the transformation of the world...

Towards a Third Cinema (55)

The popular uprising of Argentina did succeed and by 1973 democratic elections were held, electing the Peronist candidate Dr. Hector Campora, whom would then step down to allow the returning Perón to take power. Once Argentina returned to democracy, Getino claims the need for cinema was to support and uphold the fragile democracy and by "renouncing all forms of vanguardism which were outside the newly created democratic process" (105). Solanas equally represented the new place of "Third Cinema" as his next fiction film *Los hijos de Fierro*, retained theoretical and aesthetic markings of "Third Cinema", while not so directly or aggressively calling for militancy. Both subsequently received denouncements for such a position by the more radically left, as militancy and militant cinema continued in Argentina. Examples of such militancy include *Cine Grupo de la Base*, lead by Raymundo Gleyzer, as well as Pablo Szir, who was actually training in armed combat (Félix-Didier,int.), both of whom were abducted by the later dictatorship and are presumed dead. Solanas, Getino, and many others went it to exile (where in 1975 Solanas finished *Los hijos de Fierro*); and in 1976, the dictatorship "disuelve definitivamente" Birri's Escuela de Documental, as well as other crucial film schools such as La Plata, and Córdoba. (López, Interview)

Cada día que transcurra sin justicia y sin verdadera democracia es un paso de regreso hacía el pasado de escarnio y terror del que acabamos de despertar.

-Introductory title: *Juan: como si nada hubiera sucedido*

Thus, *Juan...* is one of the first critical social documentaries of Argentina, following the absolute destruction of its institutional forerunners and the murder of some of its producers. Unlike the militant cinema, *Juan...* is not a violent agitation but a civil provocation; it does not seek to destroy a “neocolonialist” past to construct a “throbbing, living reality”, but rather recover the immediate past to unveil that dynamic reality (Solanas and Getino, 47). Yet, what both seek is to transform reality through inspiring the participation of the individual as a creator of history.

Juan... itself is structured to create a mechanism of viewer identification with the investigator, as the film camera (director Carlos Echeverría) follows Esteban Buch, a radio DJ and music critic of Bariloche, with his own domestic video camera, investigating the history of the disappearance of Juan Herman. It is through Esteban then that Carlos defines and inspires the social responsibility of the individual, especially when facing social injustice and threats against democracy. Thus, the film does not call upon extreme avant-garde and agit-prop aesthetics but rather mixes traditional narrative structures with documentary.

Though Esteban’s investigation initially leads him to the family members, friends, and family friends of Juan, the information received inspires further interviews, leading all the way to major members of the police, military, and intelligence in Bariloche and Buenos Aires; the mayor of Bariloche; as well as a cellmate of Juan’s in the detention center Club Atlético. Throughout this process, Esteban and Carlos exemplify, not only the responsibility but also the accessibility of the individual citizen, to engage other individuals, whose memories contain the elements of history to which they seek. Yet, of

course it is the decision of those individuals whether or not to transmit information, as many of the military and especially the former police chief, deny any knowledge except of the fact that Juan has disappeared. Esteban and Carlos actually never learn the exact dynamic and cause of his disappearance, except that he was identified as part of the Juventud Peronista and then a militant at one time; but they do learn about his capture and subsequent sequestration, from the family, neighbor, and cellmate.

Furthermore, the investigation leads to an unveiling of the bureaucratic and political dynamic of Bariloche's political figures with the previous dictatorship, and the military in general. Thus the single occurrence of injustice threads out and exposes the larger structures that allow such events to occur. It is within these moments the film breaks and allows the viewer to contemplate the socio-economic landscape of Bariloche, as the director films their specific communal spaces, often times creating a dialectic of cultures within the city's dynamic. The first moment is the sequence in the rather desolate *villas miserias* (shantytowns), inspired by Juan's attested obsession with social inequality and the local poor, and then later contrasted with Esteban's arrival to the busy metropolis of Buenos Aires. It is through the sequence of transition, the bus ride between the two locations, that these two opposing worlds can be contemplated.

A more clashing dialect is created when the completely innerdiegetic worlds of a *boliche* (disco) and then a more traditional dance hall are experienced by the viewer, without any presence of Esteban. Here the social spaces represent almost opposite worlds of the Argentine youth. The first is the contemporary world of machine produced music, strobe lights, and a general anonymity of the darkened space; while the other is well lit and rural, the music of a traditional band, and the faces of indigenous descendents

fill the dance space. The *boliche* seems even more tragic as it is placed after the section discussing the upper and middle-class political representatives' collaboration with the dictatorship. The newly awakened consciousness of the viewer then sees the scene differently, possibly as a representation of a sour victory as the depoliticized middleclass youth enjoy the spoils of their fathers' collaboration. Their imprisonment is further emphasized when the director cuts back to the *boliche* as two police in military attire spray mace into someone's face and remove them from the club. Here is where *Juan...* retains the biting criticism of the "Third Cinema" with its openness as well as editorial wit; while on the other hand the patience and emphasis on process of investigation enables the viewer awareness and activation rather than forced response.

Furthermore, the reflection of the filmic and photographic medium upon the interaction of memory and time greatly serve to enhance the investigation of history while revealing the mode of production and distancing the viewer. In general, the film is linear in its investigation, revealing how one interview inspires the other, retaining the logic behind the process. Yet, when the film returns to an older interview they are rewound or fast-forwarded to emphasize the manipulation of the medium, as well as its ability to store memories that can be reviewed retrospectively with new information. Other times, Esteban is seen watching the tapes and taking notes, emphasizing the human interaction in reinvestigating the past, as the new domestic technology of the video recorder allows the individual to seize, collect, and define history. The point that he watches the junta trials on the same television emphasizes the difference between the collective memory and the personal, as well as the fact once again that new technology begins to allow a personal medium of memory to exist (more directly than 8mm). The

film and video medium is thus exemplified as the potential tool of the individual against the “museification” of history.

Throughout the film the moving medium of film is often contrasted with photography. Usually either during or introducing an interview, a still photo of that person is seen, sometimes merely as a reference to their past, or other times defining their identities, in former military positions, in newspapers, or later, referencing specific events and collaborations with Videla’s administration. In each moment the living persona of the interview (re)defines the dead, still moment of the photos. These contrasts emphasize the difference in the representational mediums but also in the ability for the photo to represent entire periods of time in one still instance, “*una prueba de existencia en la recordación del pasado*”. As Nelly Richard discusses, the powerful ‘proof of existence’ lies in the physical presence and subsequent connection of the photo now and when it was taken and its “ambigüedad de algo suspendido entre vida y muerte” like a phantasmal reflection of another, parallel world that once existed (Reati, 167). This power of the photo is emphatically registered in the conclusion of the film.

After walking the streets of Bariloche contemplating the weakness in the silence of the masses and the power of the military in theirs, Esteban returns to finally interview Juan’s mother, returns to the space most traumatized and the ones most scarred; the scars that exist under the compliancy and apparent unaffectedness of the people in the street. As she tearfully discusses her loss, she states that Juan was not just her son but also a good person, a good friend, as the last photo of Juan becomes the concluding image as all dissolves to black. The individual is replaced by the still image, the single reference of his life lost, perpetually frozen in youth; but yet behind that reference, the individual

viewer can find a much larger truth about themselves and the world they've been living in. After the blackness fades, there are photos of congress voting, as the screens states:

*El 22 de febrero 1987 con la ley de punto final se perdió
la última oportunidad de enjuiciar a los asesinos de Juan.*

This moment is what will be remembered in the official history, this political decision to end the investigations against the military powers, and the past murders of people like Juan. Thus it is solely upon the individual that history will be exposed, that the memories will be transmitted. In the face of the information discovered and those withheld, the viewer is inspired, enabled to become their own active creator of history, they themselves already a conduit for the story of Juan and a general understanding of the dynamics and effects of the disappeared and those institutions and social structures responsible.

Therefore, the Argentine social documentary returns as the conduit for viewer activation and the development of an enlightened consciousness that reveals a truer reality underneath that which is officially projected. Also, the increasing accessibility of video technology and the return to civil rule allows new techniques and possibilities for the individual to become an active participant in politics as well as history. The absence of wide release and international notoriety though limited this film's immediate effect and significance. Yet for those that watched it, such as Fernando Peña, who was in college at the time, the effect was extremely powerful: "*Juan...*, la fuerza de verdad del testimonio me partió la cabeza... realmente una experiencia muy muy movilizadora para mi". (Peña, Interview)

Post-Trauma: the Digital Documentary, Menem, and the Kirchners

In the turn of the century Argentina, the existence of the documentary and its continued survival in a hostile environment reveal an impulse to contribute to the process of constructing the collective memory.

-Félix-Didier, Listorti, and Luka
“The New Documentary”, *Nuevo Cine Argentino*

By December 1986, after multiple abortive military uprisings, the civilian president Raúl Alfonsín promised to cease further prosecutions within 60 days and then in February passed the Ley de Punto Final. (Knudson, 105) These subsequent difficulties would foreshadow a cultural wound that would later only become further enflamed, when in December of 1990 President Carlos Menem pardoned all Junta and militant members, imprisoned and awaiting trial. (Knudson, 106)

Then in the 90s, most likely fueled by the injustices of the Menem administration, accompanied by the increasing accessibility of digital video production, there was a burgeon in documentary production, with the *desaparecidos* being a central topic (Félix-Didier, 86). The immediate responses to Menem’s decisions could already be seen in the protests conducted by the *Madres* and the *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*. Also, family members and friends of disappeared had increased the number of published memorials in newspapers and periodicals, increasing from 20 in 1988, 68 in 1990, 140 in 1991, and then 335 in 1996 (also the 20th anniversary of the coup) (Reati, 160). Thus, the role of the past traumatic events of the military state continued to play an active role in the politics of a democratic state administration, which refused to punish the past culprits. The incited responses then showed the necessity for individual contributions in the restoration of memory and its analysis in a contemporary setting.

Such political analyses became spaces of discussing political effects and relevance of past struggles, as documentaries were released, analyzing and interviewing the leftist militant groups. The first was Di Tella's *Montoneros, una historia* (1994), a documentary aimed at providing a more thorough, human, and critical understanding of the group to the younger generations "through a narrative and reconstruction" of an ex-militant, creating "a mechanisms of fiction cinema" (Félix-Didier, 85). Then in 1996, David Blaustine, an ex-montonero released his *Cazadores de Utopía* combining powerful interviews with archival footage to once again create a critical discussion of the past and its relevance to the present. The film greatly focuses on the larger historical context that lead up to the formulation of the militant group as well as its members' interpretations now. Blaustine would go on to release *Botín de Guerra* in 2001, a documentary that followed the history of the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo in their recovery of, at that point, of 60 abducted children. Throughout the film, the history of their own resistance against silence and government impunity is combined with current interview and personal stories of those children returned to their families as teens in the 90s.

This period also coincided with the foundation of the *H.I.J.O.S.* (Hijos por la Identidad y Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) in 1995, as a group of children of the disappeared, now in their twenties, begin to band together in order to attack or *escrachar* (expose) collaborators and members of the ex-junta, especially those working for the current administration. The *H.I.J.O.S.* though not only sought justice for the disappearance of their parents, both also "reivindicamos la lucha revolucionaria de nuestro padres y sus compañeros" (Calveiro, 57). Thus the group is an extreme

manifestation of the political reverberations of the 70s today, in terms of a reactionary force in politics as well as in terms of an over-identification with that generation.

Pilar Calveiro (who herself was detained by the dictatorship) claims that this overall process of re-analysis during the 90s, had crystallized around 1998 and 99 in the emergence of “una memoria militante” as opposed to the “víctima inocente” which had been constructed in many “biográficos, novelas, y películas” such as *La noche de los lápices* and even *Juan: como sin nada hubiera sucedido* to an extent. This reinterpretation, combined with the lack of executive social reparation, “recuperara su dignidad pero también sus responsabilidades específicas” (Calveiro, 56). Thus, the militant ideals against an unjust and corrupt neoliberal government begin to take on new meaning after multiple corruption charges were brought to light, and in face of the fact that Menem privatized almost all of the major national companies in oil, rail, airlines, and telecommunications (*Memoria del saqueo*). Yet, the seriousness of the political situation at that time, as Argentina sunk closer and closer to economic crisis, combined with the horrifying outcome of the 70s militancy necessitated a critical re-analysis of the means of dissent. This can be seen in the absence of arms among those indentifying themselves with that period as well as the retrospective criticism of ex-members, discussed in the documentaries such as *Montoneros, una historia*, *Cazadores de Utopía*, and later *errepé* (2003, about the Marxist PRT-ERP).

This new critical scope of history was examined within fiction films as well. In 1999, *Garage Olimpo* was released, an emotionally intense and extremely meticulous recreation of the infamous detention center of the same name. The director Mario Bechis, who was actually held in the Club Atlético detention center, before going into

exile, not only wished to create an extremely genuine representation of the individual dynamics and psychological ambience, but also the moral complexities of the militants as well as the security forces. The central protagonists have a complex relationship as the woman is a captured militant and the man is in charge of torture (portrayed as just doing his job), a relationship actually based loosely upon a real situation, discussed in *Montoneros, una historia*. The film incorporates elements of classic narrative structuring, forcing the viewer to question their identifications with the character, while ultimately retaining historical accuracy, pointedly concluding with the central character being drugged and then thrown off an army cargo plane into the sea.

As Argentina passed into the twenty-first century the political struggle and violent clashes of protest were no longer images of the past, but exploded into the streets and in front of the central presidential square on December 8, 2001. The president de la Rúa had inherited a 140 billion debt when coming into office in 1999. As he struggled to appoint new economic ministers and pull the country out of crisis, the economy sunk further and further into recession, eventually resulting in the IMF stopping 1.3 billion dollar of their aid, and causing banks to freeze accounts. The already growing protests and general strikes then exploded, especially in response to the banks decisions, as crowds of adults and the elderly beat the barricaded buildings with pots and pans. Then on December 8, as large-scale protests met in front of the presidential building, the police forces responded with violence. A violence that would intensify throughout the next two weeks until de la Rúa resigned on December 20, after 25 people died in the protests (BBC.com).

While this political violence was happening, Fernando Solanas was there with his cinematographer Alejandro Fernández Mouján, filming the central points of conflict. This filming then would go on to become Solanas' return to documentary filmmaking and the shadows of the "Third Cinema". After producing numerous fiction films since his going into exile, most notably *Tango, el exilio de Gardel* (1985), *Sur* (South, 1988), and *El Viaje* (The Journey, 1992), Solanas then released *Memoria del saqueo* (Eng. rel. Social Genocide, 2004). *Memoria del saqueo* is an intense and thorough analysis of the 2001 economic crash and the failures and corruptions throughout the return to democracy, that lead to that crash. Its structure and aesthetic is as equally didactic and its images of violence and poverty as equally agitating, as *La hora de los hornos*. Yet, its critique of the historical and political situation of Argentina is much more mature, more academic as the interviews consist of economic and political analysts that construct a large and slightly cumbersome thesis against the governing bodies since 1983, especially attacking Carlos Menem. Solanas was actually attacked, shot 6 times in the legs, during the filming, allegedly by forces associated with Menem.

Then in 2005, Solanas released *La dignidad del los nadies* (The dignity of the nobodies) which explores a more personal side of the country's economic failures, following specific individuals and families, the *piqueteros*, unemployed protests group, as well as public institutions such as health care. The personal stories, especially of extremely impoverished families and their multitude of children are extremely emotional and slightly exploitative. In this film, the agit-prop aesthetic is minimal as the narrative is more based around individual stories and then revealing their association or relevance to specific political and historical moments.

During the time of Solanas film releases though, the political context for the general country was much different than in 1968, or even 2001. Nestor Kirchner, the Neo-Peronist president who won in 2003 (because Menem had to drop out due to pressures of multiple corruption charges) began to greatly restructure the economy and regain the confidence of the IMF and World Bank. By 2005, Kirchner was able to pay off the multi-billion dollar debt to the IMF, finally stabilizing an international issue that had been plaguing Argentine politics since the end of the dictatorship (BBC.com). Also that year the Supreme Court declared that amnesties for former members of the dictatorship were unconstitutional, after Congress voted in 2003 to end laws protecting them from further prosecution (BBC.com). On March 24, 2004, Kirchner opened up the ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada), one of the largest detention centers, into the Museum of Memory (now the Space of Memory). The space was initially proposed to be torn down and replaced with a golf course by Menem in order ‘to begin a future in peace’ (Abrevaya, Interview).

Thus, the political and economic atrocities that Solanas witnessed during the late 60s as well as the 90s, became somewhat overshadowed as Kirchner stabilized the economy and brought justice to the memory of the 70s dictatorship. Also, the multiple charges brought against Menem, for tax fraud as well as illegal arms sales to Bosnia, created a logistical prison around the former president. So the new political system under Kirchner not only stabilized the country but also fortified itself against the corrupt legacy of the former president and championed the liberal legacy of the youth movements of the sixties and seventies. As, Abrevaya and Centrone, of the Espacio para la Memoria, stated, the new left ‘now has become fractured’ by the absence of obvious political

injustice (int.). This return of a sense of just democracy or what Ricardo Forster calls “capitalismo responsable” then changes the public perception of political history and specifically the history of the *desaparecidos* (Forster, 66). As Silvia Schwarzböck discusses in her book *Estudio crítico sobre Crónica de una fuga*, the sense of political healing of the legacy of the 70s completely changed the emotional effect of representing this time period, “para el público fue ostensiblemente más fácil ver una película ambiente dentro de un campo de concentración de la dictadura” (18). The very representation of this period then triggered new responses, after so many years of debate, discussions, struggles, and triumphs, and after it had been re-integrated into the ruling government.

Post-Memory and Post-Modernism: *Los rubios* and *Crónica de una fuga*

...una fotografía representa una constelación fija de objetos o personas, mientras que el film representa un proceso, es decir un cambio de constelaciones

-Ralph Buchenhorst *Testigos, científicos, artistas:*
¿Cómo crear un foro de la memoria del terror? (Lorenzo 231)

By the turn of the century, there were a number of documentaries by children of the disappeared as they reached their late twenties and begun to question the disappearances of their parents, who were around the same age at the time. *Papa Iván* (2000) and *Historias cotidianas* (2000) are two well-known examples. The former is specifically about the director revisiting her past and the people who surrounded her Montonero father, while the later is the director talking to others who recount their experience about the loss of their parents. Being of the same age their parents were when abducted, the children begin to question their histories and lost identities.

The first issue that confounds the position of a child of a disappeared is that the effects of the traumatic event are exaggerated by the child's lack of formative cognitive

schemas of their world. Furthermore, there is the effect of larger collective memory replacing the children's later understanding of their own personal or familial history. What films like *La Noche...* and countless reports and stories had created was an effect termed "postmemory", defined by Marianne Hirsch, as "the relationship between children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experience of their parents, experiences they "remember" only as the stories and images with which they grew up with" (M. Hirsch, 8). Both of these issues of memory become inspirations then to investigate the lost individual past, which have become substituted by collective memories and stories.

Once again, the introduction of *Los rubios* is important for framing the intentions of the film as well as its declared relation to the events of the past. The film begins with a Playmobil farmhouse accompanied by an audio track of farm noises, ironically timed to the plastic and paper animals. This is the filmmaker's past; it is physically unrecoverable except through the objects she held onto and the worlds she recreated with them (then and now). The sounds of a child's voice giving orders to her sibling is heard over the stop-animation Playmobil dolls as the scenery fades into the same farm in the present, beautiful and serene, but devoid of the human lives represented by the small plastic dolls. The imagined words of the past are the only sutures that connect these two worlds, as the audio track continues through the setting change.

The tranquility of the farm is then destroyed by an overhead shot of the city streets, and all its copious sounds. The director is then seen on the roof of a building reading Isidro Velazquez; a small building in the background has the word theatre written out it. This is her world, completely cut off from the rural pleasantries of her past. Yet, as

we find out later, her father wrote a book on Velazquez, the words and the name are the only connections. The next scene is then the director walking through a neighborhood, carrying a camera, before she stops at a house, asking a woman questions about her lost family. The vantage point of the viewer jumps in between cameras, sometimes partially blocked by the barred fence in front of the house, and other times showing the director and the sound person, as the former shouts questions through the gate to the woman, who remains at her window. The director is still outside of the house, a stranger, like we are strangers to her, merely tagging along.

The multiple shots of the director establish the viewer's understanding of the process of researching the past through the words of the older generation. The exteriority of the director to the domestic space is also emphasized by the digitally textured inter-title, stating the date of the director's parents' disappearance and the subsequent disappearance of the father's three siblings. The loss of her extended family emphasizes the complete separation from her past life and any possible familial recovery now. Carri does have two older sister's but neither appear in the film except through references. One refused and the other 'said all the right things after the camera was off'.

The next shot then is the introduction of the actress Analía Couceyro, who proclaims to the camera that she will be playing Albertina Carri. Carri then is deconstructing the central role of the traumatized youth rediscovering her past in a self-reflexive gesture that implies that her role as victim contains emotional expectations and self-validating constructs. As opposed to manipulating herself or the viewer, Carri refuses such constructs and expectations, and rather explicitly deconstructs them throughout the rest of the film. The next sequence after Couceyro's introduction,

explicates the forced or specious connection of actors and settings, as she repeats, about ten times, a moving shot of the actress standing still in front of the farm fields.

For the rest of the film, Couceyro becomes the empathetic figure, the vicarious mediation between the director's experience and our understanding. Initially, Couceyro is seen doing an interview, and then smoking a cigarette, contemplating the words of the woman, which is heard on the audio track. But as the film continues, her role is increasingly jarred by cuts to black and white scenes of the director and the crew discussing the shots or preparing for the next scene. Even as Couceyro revisits Carri's home and talks about her past, becoming very visibly emotional, the film cuts to black and white and the preparation for another shot. Couceyro then is a mediator for Carri's experience, speaking her words and adding an emotional body to her story. This is not merely a structural trick, but rather it raises questions of the extent to which a person perceives their own identity, based upon personally constructed narratives applied to specific spatial-temporal parameters.

The fact that Carri's implies the transparency or arbitrariness of spatial-temporal parameters in the construction of memory undermines accepted practices of memory recall in documentary filmmaking. In the other documentaries made by children of the disappeared, the revisiting and reenacting of the past was central to the testimonies. Furthermore, this was the major theoretical application in *Shoah*, considered by many to be the greatest Holocaust account ever produced. In *Shoah*, Lanzmann never uses any images from the past, but rather focuses on the effects of the present through testimonial reenactments based upon "Sartrean existential psychoanalysis, that there is a physical materiality even prior to the symbolizing process of language" (Liebman, 129). Carri

then has refuted such beliefs by emphasizing the usages of language in memory construction over any physical associations or materiality.

This seems to imply that memories don't even exist, but are rather a constantly changing body of linguistic referents to a fleeting past. The linguistic referents themselves though are arbitrary, and do not always refer to the specifics of a situation. After one interview, we see Carri in the back of the car next to her fictional representation Couceyro, who is still in character. As Carri stares out the window we hear a voice over of her words, spoken by Couceyro, about when she was 12 and her extended family tried to explain to her the complex political situation and the absence of her parents. Though the explanation consisted of all the well known groups, Evita's "shirtless" workers, Peronists, and the Montoneros, such historically loaded terms had no actual meaning to her conception of that period, so all she was left imagining were 'gunshots and heroes'. Thus, though she knew what the words referenced and the collectively known story of the groups, such constructs did and do not really help in the understanding of who her parents were and what world they lived in. Rather, it shows the ways in which pre-defined assumptions of a collectively known history become projected upon individual understandings, with the naïve concept of heroes then becoming further materialized with the representation of innocence and valor among early portrayals of the militants. This relates once again to the difficulty of "post-memory" when trying to understand something that is "mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation" (M. Hirsch, 8).

These linguistic constructs then become projected upon spatial-temporal parameters as well as indexical referents such as photos, personal or collective. At one

point in the film a neighbor's story is heard as Carri's camera moves across a wall of photos. Each photo gives a sense of understanding to that referred moment but they are all placed together simultaneously and become difficult to navigate between the different moments, children, and even generations. Thus, there is no clear teleological structure in the photos, but rather a reassignment of meaning through language-based narratives, that are themselves influenced by larger collective narratives.

Throughout the film Carri's understanding of the past is mediated through new stories from her family's old neighbors and friends. They themselves are also not merely mediated through larger narratives, but also mediated through the expectations and language games of interview practices. In order to emphasize this point, a majority of the interviews are presented through televisions, as the actress Couceyro watches them and takes notes. Carri then emphasizes the epistemological issues that accompany interviews, and then their subsequent construction into a documentary.

Even her own memories are epistemologically questionable as she states, 'I don't know if some memories are real or if they're my sister's'. Her whole life then she has been living through memories that are mediated through the stories of others around her. When her parents were abducted she was 4 years old. Studies have found that at the age of 3 or 4, children just begin to develop memory recall, which also correlates to their growing capacity for sentence construction and narrative capabilities (Abbott, 2). Such a fragile memory of the real is then exacerbated by the "complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma and in the stories associated with it" (Caruth, 4). All Albertina Carri has of an actual past then is the barely formed

autobiographical understanding, created with language and represented through the Playmobil dolls.

The dolls appear throughout the film, as Carri's parents have multiple barbeques on the farm, before an UFO eventually abducts them, as they try to escape down the highway. The UFO represents the fantastical trivialization of dramatic recreations of such experiences; and it also refers to the rather fantastical transformation of memory over time. The UFO recreation is actually placed after a neighborhood woman, sitting outside with a group of children, states that everyone in the Carri family had blonde hair. Considering the fact that Carri herself has black hair and is standing directly in front of the woman, exemplifies the individual capability to retain narrative elements even after being disproved. After the UFO Playmobil scene, Carri and her crew say goodbye to the woman and drive off. That night they stop by the side of the highway to collect sounds for the UFO scene. Thus while the playschool scenes represent her childhood memory, they are once again reconstructed for the sake of the film.

Couceyro is then seen wearing a blonde wig, now that her identity has been once again redefined. Then she is seen with black hair once again screaming repeatedly in the woods outside of the farm, a sarcastic representation of Carri's frustration with the impossibility of regaining a lost past. The rest of the film mostly revolves around Black and White scenes of the crew joking and hanging out with their dogs (absent until this point). The scenes are cut in between with color footage of Couceyro acting in the same spaces. Then in the end the entire crew, director, and actress wear blonde wigs as they set up the final shot of all of them walking down the farm road. The past family will

never been found, but at least Carri has this family to continue her films, her identity and her life.

Therefore, over the process of her film, Carri has developed a sense of understanding of her past, defined by those around her parents. The fact that she chose family friends and neighbors versus intellectual contemporaries of her parents (initially the state denied her funding for not interviewing “important figures”) prove the personal search of a lost familial identity, rather than one defined by cultural producers. Yet, during her investigation she has learned the extent to which the true picture under all the stories ceases to exist, as does her past identity. In the film she and Couceyro go for a blood test to verify relations to the disappeared parents, and Couceyro signs herself as Carri. Once again she emphasizes the disconnection between words and their infinitely more complex referents, a running theme in the work but also a very real issue for those children of the disappeared still living under pro-Junta families. Thus the issue of personal identity still plagues those individuals who are disconnected from their family identity.

Carri has come to address this issue and has complexly and self-reflexively “achieved a critical distance” in “working through” traumatic experiences. Working through as defined by Dominick LaCapra in his work on Holocaust memory, is the psychologically healthy process for trauma recovery, while “acting out” is the self-destructive reliving of trauma. Marianne Hirsch discusses LaCapra theory in terms of “tragic identification and the constitution of one’s self as surrogate victim ... results in retraumatization” (M. Hirsch, 16). Thus through Carri’s practices, especially of using an actress to act out her investigation in recovering her own past, she not only achieved a

deconstructive critique on memory and film, but was also able to distance herself from any possibility of retraumatization.

It is also true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallized, perfected, adorned, installing itself in the place of raw memory and growing at its expense

-Primo Levi
The Drowned and the Saved (24)

Crónica de una fuga was released in 2006, directed by Israel Adrián Caetano, one of the most internationally renowned of the new generation of Argentine film auteurs to arise from the mid to late 90s or the “generation of orphans”. The consideration of Caetano’s role as an auteur as well as his international standing will play a significant role in the formulation of his representation of 4 detainees who escaped from a detention center. Furthermore, considering the drastic legislative and political changes that had accompanied the initial series of agitated judicial decisions to pardon the guilty members involved in the *Guerra sucia*, and the amount of time and critical space allotted to the reinterpretation of that period, the mid to late 2000s can be seen as a post-traumatized period of Argentina history. The questions then are what freedoms are accompanied to works of art in face of a sense of closure, as well as what limitations accompany the repeated filmic and artistic representations and reconstructions before.

In Silvia Schwarzböck’s book *Estudio crítico sobre Crónica de una fuga*, she claims that the history of fictional representations of the theme “será invariablemente un drama psicológico. *Crónica de una fuga*, al romper con esta convención, marca un hito (milestone) estético” (15). Rather than emphasizing emotional and psychological ruptures in familial or sexual relationships, the film almost purely focuses on the

experience at the detention center itself. The formalist break from such conventions is constructed through the narrative structuring as well as the manipulation or disruption of certain mechanisms of identification, much like the intended effects of *Garage Olimpo* as well as *Potestad* (2001). *Garage Olimpo* mixed the identification of sexual relationships within the context of detainee-torturer, while *Potestad* developed an emotional identification with a character plagued by traumatic flashbacks, who is later revealed at the end to be a doctor who aided in the dictatorship's sale of babies.

In *Crónica de una fuga*, the central character Claudio Tamburrini, and the author of *Passe libre* (Free Pass), the book in which the film is based upon, is introduced only after the invasion of his house by the military forces. He himself is playing goalie in a soccer match at the time, but the point is that unlike *La Noche de los lápices* the verisimilitude of a domestic or familial space is destroyed as soon as the film starts. Then shortly there after he is taken to the detention center, as the introductory titles formally begin the film. The viewer is not given time to form a strong identification with the character and is only left with the empathetic investment in the character, especially considering his apparent innocence.

As the film continues then, Claudio is the central character of the narrative (considering this is his story) but he never appears extremely strong, heroic, or even optimistic, lacking the positive qualities a viewer might expect from their protagonist. This absence of heroism is truer to Claudio's own intentions of the story as in the introduction of his account he writes that this is not a story of heroes and villains. This attempt at deconstructing narrative expectations of accounts of the sequestered and disappeared also coincides with Pilar Calveiro's (also detained in the Mansión Seré)

account and analysis in *Poder y desaparición* (1998), in which she writes “No hay héroes en los campos de concentración...” (Schwarböck, 27). Thus the attempted complete abstraction of the historical period as an exceptional situation and experience relates to the theoretical and critical development of the history as it became more distant.

Also, within this critical conception of the past was the increasing analysis of the complex political dynamics, especially within the militant groups as well as those who were sequestered. The reason that Claudio was taken in the first place was because of another inmate arbitrarily giving his name, in order to cease the continuous torture. Then once the actual militant is brought in, he himself gives an extremely generous amount of information and is kindly released from the center within a few days. Fernando Peña argues that this point thematically is the most important contribution of the film to the history of narratives and documentaries to deal with the subject, more so than any aesthetic milestones or breakthroughs.

The aesthetics of the film itself is very stylized and extremely expressionistic as the hand-held camera and high contrast shadows create a psychologically intense atmosphere at all times, a sense of claustrophobia that the viewer can never fully break out of or into. Rather the viewer is placed within the space and its extremely tense climate, strongly exaggerated by the musical score, while never fully taking the perspective of the characters. Also, like *Garage Olimpo*, *Crónica de una fuga* contains the possibility of identifying with the torturer rather than the tortured. In both films, one way of this construction is to not directly portray the act of torture itself. In *Garage Olimpo*, Félix is often seen with the rod in his hand but never actually touching the body, as the scenes either cut or the doors close, with the screams drowned out by loud radios.

Caetano also decides not to represent the electric prod torture, but rather only to hear Claudio's screams as the guards watch on, unaffected. Caetano gives two epistemological and moral reasons as well for the absence of explicit representation. The first is that the explicit representation of torture and the victims response will always be the same, and the second is that torture "es una experiencia íntima" that can not be explained, and which the spectators can never understand and never fully have access to (Caetano, 84-85). Furthermore, Caetano and Schwarzböck claim that the construction of power within the isolated and exceptional social dynamic of the detention center leads to the possible identification of the viewer with the guards (53). Thus the aesthetics of the film allow a sense of the intensity and pressure that existed within the detention centers, while the character construction allows an ambiguity that opens up new conscious or unconscious placements of viewer identification or investment. Such ambiguities and shifting viewer expectations then contain the possibility of reflecting upon their own individual ideals in the face of the official national stories of innocence that are often represented in popular recreations.

Moreover, unlike older filmic representations, as well as newer fictions such as *Cautiva* (2004) that embeds the story of the daughter of a disappeared within the genre of a family separation film, *Crónica de una fuga* is not specifically embedded within a single genre but creates a contemporary reinterpretation of multiple genre expectations and devices, with the most prominent one being "el terror y el western" (Caetano, 78). Thus, the film's reading becomes somewhat of a game of visual syntax of pre-existing visual styles and references that are restructured within the experience of the detention center and this specific period in Argentina's history.

For example, certain elements such as the lighting and music ('referencing John Carpenter', Caetano, 79) are associative to pre-existing styles while other elements are more direct references such as the house, *Mansión Seré*, where the detention center is based, is as Caetano sates, "sí fue Hitchcock...Tiene la presencia que tiene la casa de *Psicosis*" (Caetano, 76). Thus the specific and explicit combination of well known film references creates a "pastiche", as defined by Frederic Jameson, "is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry...Pastiche is blank parody" (Jameson, 131). Thus, the exceptional nature of the event becomes further abstracted, as it becomes rather a very filmic and stylized construction of that event. This explicit referencing and implicit self-reflexivity of the film as a film corresponds with a larger body of post-modern aesthetics that Jameson helped to define. As Jameson states post-modernism "is to correlate new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and economic order...postindustrial or consumer society...or multinational capitalism" (129). The postmodern pastiche of *Crónica de una fuga* is extremely paradigmatic once analyzed from a point of globalization and multinational capitalism, considering the fact that it is distributed by 20th Century Fox.

...los circuitos de exposición y comercialización reconocidos son marcos que dan contexto a toda la producción simbólica e impiden la sorpresa en espectadores que saben toda lo que hay en esos espacios...

-Julio Flores *Arte del museo:
memoria ¿de que?* (Lorenzo, 183)

As Campodónico claims, the explicit reference to *Psycho* as well as the stereotypical bad guy with the large black moustache and trench coat, usually associated with film noir characters (or drug-traffickers), then allows for an international public to more rapidly understand the dynamics of the film. It is through this larger economic

context that the films pastiche serves not merely for stylistic or contemporary reinterpretation, but moreover for the codification of its message within the larger syntax of classic film history.

This is not merely representative then of stylistic trends and postmodern auteur filmmaking, but the possible state of international film and the overtly creation of exportable reconstructions of traumatic national histories. The absence of a large political analysis within the film also helps to limit the historical complexities for a foreign audience. Though the film does portray the contradictions within the militant organizations especially once faced with torture, it is a micro-political issue, within the detention center itself. The larger political context though is summed up merely within the introductory notes as well as the concluding titles, after the escape. The infinitely larger historical politics is merely a textual parenthesis, static and factual, while the experience of being in the detention center becomes the central focus, a simulated rendition that hovers between the space of Argentine history and that of classic film history. “Hence, once again, pastiche... is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Jameson, 132). Thus, the viewers are not addressed through an over abundance of a didactic history, but rather satiated through the associative experience of watching a film, and nothing more.

Therefore, though the film contains the markings of a newly critical and distanced perspective of this period in Argentine history, this same distance creates negative effects as well once the exceptionality of such events become marketable and fully merged within the realm of international studio cinema. The construction of a more complexly expressionistic representation, as well as the internal contradictions of the innocent

victims, both open new possibilities for the future of fiction representations. But the large-scale emergence into the international market also opens a more dangerous possibility for the manipulation of this history and its contemporary role in society.

Conclusions and Open Questions

For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places the existence as a living being in question.

-Michel Foucault
The History of Sexuality (143)

From the release of *La Historia oficial* in 1985 to *Los rubios* and *Crónica de una fuga*, the formalistic and thematic constructions and representations of Argentina's last dictatorship have radically changed. Also during this period the legislative and executive processes of coming to terms with this period have radically changed, as presidential administrations swing from one extreme to another. During the course of this process, the immediacy of a never dying traumatic past becomes more and more obvious, while the inevitable returns always bring new conceptualizations and formations of that violent struggle and the infinite factors that lead to its existence. Though, executive powers can be seen as contain the strongest effect in their handlings of this period's contemporary political relevance, each active participation in the recreation of this history creates a ripple across the plane of public memory. Each of these ripples of course containing their own pre-decided directions and intentions that inevitably cause opposing effects or reactionary forces, in the larger national discourse of history and identity.

The existence of the filmic medium and its vast technological and meta-linguistic accessibility allow for an extremely large network of possible transmissions and retransmissions of these stories. The audiovisual components of the medium moreover

allow for a seemingly live transmission of the past as well as its sustained possibility for reanimation, of which, unlike human memory, stays in its original form, unaffected physically from the years of associations and reformulations of senses and phenomena long vanished. It is rather the perception and interpretation of the re-experience of filmic phenomena that allows for its meaning to be redefined in each changing context, allowing for a meta-criticism. The weighted effect (and its construction) of the individual films themselves though is always contextualized as well, knowingly and unknowingly, as its encoded message not only contains the markings of the individual makers but also the society to which they are responding.

The need for stability and a linear and coherent construction of the final and most destructive cultural rupture in recent Argentine history was obviously more apparent in the mid to late 80s than it is now. The large-scale traumatization as well as the profound guilt that most likely shocked the nation immediately following the return to democracy needed a quick explanation. As theories such as the “dos demonios” proposed that two extremely violent opposing sides, bidding for power, alienated and forced the general population out of the arena of politics; while films such as *La Historia oficial* and *La Noche...* attempted to define an innocence among the middle class and the missing, as both sides were victims of a larger economic and military superstructure that robbed all possibilities of normalcy and societal participation.

Yet, the historical trivialization and the generic and emotional effects of the film remain a dangerous misrepresentation for those who have yet to fully form critical stances on this history. *La Noche...* for example, as it is still shown today in high schools, has proven to be a site of ritual and repetition, a possible retraumatization, as

groups of high school students have reenacted the film version of the event and posted it on youtube. To what extent the students have achieved psychological damage is unreported, but the reenactment nonetheless proves the ability of retraumatization through a lack of critical distance from a film and from its subsequent viewers. Once again, this practice also exhibits the inabilities of the teachers to explain this historical period, even so many years retrospectively.

One of the inherent negative effects of teaching such loaded emotional subject matters through loaded emotional portrayals is the verisimilar world of young bodies (especially those representing the missing) and their temporal suspension, forever tragically repeating their own deaths to be retransmitted over and over again. It is through the process of survival and the marking of time in the testimony that allows an instinctual separation from the stories of the past and their narrators, an instinctual function lost with undead film recreations. Moreover, the linguistically structured conceptualization of the individual's experience is already packaged as a critical or analytical interpretation. Its transmission then can be unpacked and analyzed further, but there is already the initial process of analytical and retrospective narrative structuring that has been performed, and by those closest to the phenomena themselves.

If an individual's history were solely constructed upon fictional recreations, they would forever analyze an abstracted world, a simulcrum, that existed as inverted mirrors, facing more so the makers than the constellations of historical events and their barely perceivable existence today. Once individuals like Albertina Carri, begin to construct their own history of this exceptional and traumatic past, they realized that they were disconnected, isolated among these mirrors and projections, that inevitably collapse upon

them as they attempt to experience something outside of that. When spatial and temporal limitations of the human body's relation to events are connected through "prosthetic memories", they are forever cold and replaceable substitutes for an absent, phantasmal existence that is knowingly or unknowingly felt, though never originally experienced.

Yet, the reapplication of those history's meanings, especially within a larger socio-political arena, continue to recharge the relevance of these complex psychological and emotional formulations within the individual. As each political or popular figure evokes their presence, they cull and pull the long built up string of dense associations and experiences and residual pain that is condensed and coiled within the individual. So when the Kirchners reference this period in one of their political speeches it is not as champions of healing, but as emotional puppet masters of the still scarred masses, especially the older generations that still retain the loosely associated experiences, fears, and guilt, that the isolated mirror worlds of the current youth do not possess. So as the generation of the guilty join the world of the *desaparecidos*, as non-existent referents of the country's past, it is the generation of the scarred, the witnesses, that will act as the bridge for the future generations.

As Fernando Pino Solanas gets older, he has become fervently inspired to return to the "Third Cinema" project and expose the larger mechanisms and superstructures of economic and social oppression that still exist within his country. Yet, though his work is very internationally renown, his place in the film museum having already been established, the negative or reactionary response by many of the Argentine youth, especially the young generation of filmmakers and critics, represents a large generational gap that exists, mostly due to the scars of violence. Thus, though there is respect for the

militant generation of the 60s and 70s, the large social absences and traumatic wounds are inevitably tied up and connected to their own violent project, and sometimes considered, if not all together selfish, at least short-sighted.

The only question then is how will the younger generation treat that past as they grow old enough not to remember, but to replace that history with their own, isolated interpretations, their own constellations of pocketed mirror worlds. On one side there is the examples of Albertina Carri and María Inés Roqué (*Papá Iván*), who have allowed their identities to facilitate them to possess more profound understandings of the individuals' place within history and the presence of an alien memory that is not their own. On another side there is the H.I.J.O.S. as well as some of the members of the Espacio para la Memoria, whose morbid projection of the most horrible details of this period allow them to construct an atrocious superstructure of oppression and manipulation, whose remaining spirit must be forever fought, creating a symbiotic rationalization for their political views and participation. Then, on an other side there is Israel Adrián Caetano who represents the depoliticized manipulation of this history, creating a postmodern story that will allow for a larger international transmission, a more defined and exportable reflection within the imaginary museum of film. So, as the next ten years bring the conclusion of the first wave of the post-dictatorship period and its strongest felt generations, new generations will emerge to reflect upon the purpose and the effects of this traumatic history and its shaping of the collective identity, memory, and history of Argentina.

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Campodónico, Horacio. Professor of Cinema at the University of Visual Arts, Santa Fe; and at the University of Buenos Aires.

Centrone, Andrés. Guide/Cruator of Espacio para la memoria

Félix-Didier, Paula. Director of Museo de Cine. Film critic and historian.

Listorti, Leandro. Organizer for BAFICI (Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente). Director of Photography. Film critic.

López, Rolando. Advisor of ISCAA in Santa Fe.

Loguerico, Evagelina. Director of Photography. Museo de Cine. MALBA.

Peña, Fernando. Director of Cinema at the MALBA (Museo de Arte Latino-americano, Buenos Aires). Film Historian and Critic, Television special.

Sendrós, Daniel. Film Historian and Critic. Museo de Cine.

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